

Social media and academic performance: A study of university students in South-Eastern Nigeria

Onodugo Ifeanyi Chris¹, Dr Uzochukwu Silba², Onyeledo Peace Ijeoma³, Chidi Enemo Chinaza⁴

¹ Professor, Department of General Studies, College of Health Science and Technology, Ezzamgbo, Ebonyi State Nigeria

² Department of Business Admin, Charisma University USA, United States America

³ Department of Human Resource Management, Charisma University USA, United States America

⁴ Department of Education Management, Charisma University USA, United States America

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media on the academic performance of university students in Nigeria, employing a causal-comparative research design. Four tertiary institutions were selected for the study: Abia State University, Uturu; Madonna University, Okija; Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki; and Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu. The population comprised students from various departments in each institution. Using a purposive sampling technique, 25 undergraduate students were selected from each university, making a total sample size of 100 students. Capture sampling was used to administer the research instrument. Findings revealed that students' use of social media is largely non-academic. The most commonly used platforms were Facebook (40.81%), WhatsApp (20.40%), and 2go/Skype (14.28%), while platforms such as MySpace, Twitter, Badoo, Blogs/Web Scholars, Google+, and Social Bookmarking sites were rarely used for academic purposes. Another key finding indicated that students predominantly use social media to communicate with friends—both near and far—and to access general life information. The study concludes by offering recommendations to mitigate the negative influence of social media on students' academic performance in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Social media, academic performance, university students, Nigeria

Introduction

In the 21st century, education has increasingly shifted toward a technology-driven model, integrating digital innovations to enhance teaching and learning processes. Among these innovations, social media has emerged as a transformative tool in the education sector, contributing significantly to national development. Over the past decades, social media platforms have positively influenced communication and interaction within educational communities. These platforms now play a vital role in facilitating academic, social, and even political engagement for those connected to them (Oghenetega, Oyenike, & Ugeh, 2014) [7].

The growing adoption of e-learning systems in higher education institutions across Nigeria highlights the substantial impact of technology, particularly the internet, on modern learning. Social networking tools have become central to discussions around educational reform, with many institutions leveraging ICT to address both academic and administrative challenges (Awodele, Idowu, Anjorin, Adedire, & Akpor, 2009) [1].

In a world increasingly driven by information, social media provides undergraduates with essential digital skills and exposure that enhance their employability and career prospects. As the job market becomes more competitive, universities are being challenged to produce graduates who are not just job seekers but innovative job creators. However, many institutions still struggle with the effective implementation of modern technologies, which undermines the goals of existing and emerging e-learning systems.

Traditional methods of teaching are no longer sufficient to meet the evolving educational needs of students. As Oghenetega and Ejedafiru (2014) [7] emphasized, social media continues to simplify communication and information sharing, offering multiple benefits across academic, social, and political domains.

Social networking sites (SNSs): such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and MySpace—are web-based platforms that enable users to create profiles, build connections, and engage in information exchange (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) [2]. These platforms also serve as professional hubs where groups like the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) can establish forums and share resources. SNSs foster two-way, transparent communication that supports feedback, community building, and knowledge co-creation (Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Courtney, 2007) [3, 8].

These technologies allow educators and librarians to assume more interactive roles by engaging with students online. Through blogs, group discussions, and direct communication, academic professionals can anticipate student needs and deliver timely support, thereby deepening student-library engagement and enhancing the overall educational experience.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to assess the impact of social media on the academic performance of undergraduate students in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Investigate whether social media contributes positively or negatively to the academic development of undergraduate students.
2. Determine the educational performance levels of students who actively use social media in Nigerian universities.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to four selected universities in South-Eastern Nigeria. These include:

- Abia State University, Uturu
- Madonna University, Okija
- Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu
- Delta State University, Abraka

The focus is on undergraduate students across various faculties in these institutions, examining how their engagement with social media affects their academic achievement.

Research Method

This study adopted a causal-comparative research design to examine the impact of social media usage on the academic performance of undergraduate students. Four tertiary institutions were selected for the study: Abia State University, Uturu; Madonna University, Okija; Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki; and Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu.

The population of the study comprised all students across various departments in the selected institutions. Using a purposive sampling technique, 25 students were selected from each institution, making a total sample size of 100 undergraduate students. A capture sampling method was employed for the distribution of the research instrument.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire, which was distributed with the assistance of colleagues in the respective institutions. Out of the total distributed questionnaires, 98 were completed and returned, representing the final dataset for analysis. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequency counts and percentage distributions.

Discussion of Results

Impact of Social Media on Academic Work

Impact Type	Responses	Percentage (%)
Positive Impact	33	33.67
Negative Impact	65	66.33
Total	98	100

The results indicate that a majority of respondents (66.33%) believe that social media negatively impacts their academic performance, while 33.67% recognize a positive influence. Although social media facilitates timely information sharing, its addictive nature appears to adversely affect students' concentration and study habits.

Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	30	30.61
No	70	71.41
Undecided	5	5.10
Total	98	100

A significant proportion of students (71.41%) reported that they do not use social media for academic purposes. Only 30.61% indicated academic use, while a few (5.10%) were undecided. This suggests that the primary purpose of social media among undergraduates is not academic.

Academic Activities Supported by Social Media

Activity	Responses	Percentage (%)
Assignments	9	9.18
Research	0	0.00
Information	55	56.12
Other Uses	34	34.69
Total	98	100

The majority of respondents (56.12%) use social media

primarily for accessing general information, while 34.69% use it for miscellaneous non-academic activities. Only 9.18% utilize it for completing assignments, and none reported using it for research purposes.

Most Common Social Media Platforms Used

Platform	Responses	Percentage (%)
Facebook	40	40.81
WhatsApp	20	20.40
2go / Skype	14	14.28
YouTube	6	6.12
Google+ / Social Bookmarking	5	5.10
Badoo	5	5.10
MySpace	3	3.06
Blogs / Web Scholars	3	3.06
Twitter	2	2.04
Total	98	100

The data reveals that Facebook (40.81%) and WhatsApp (20.40%) are the most commonly used social media platforms among students, followed by 2go/Skype (14.28%). Other platforms like Twitter, MySpace, and blogs are minimally used.

Time Spent on Social Media Activities

Time Spent	Responses	Percentage (%)
30 Minutes	10	10.20
1–2 Hours	50	51.02
3–5 Hours	9	9.18
Over 5 Hours	29	29.59
Total	98	100

Over half of the respondents (51.02%) spend 1–2 hours daily on social media. Notably, 29.59% reported usage of over 5 hours daily, which may contribute to the negative academic impact. Only a small percentage (10.20%) use it for 30 minutes or less.

Reasons for Using Social Media

Reason	Responses	Percentage (%)
For general information about life	30	30.61
Reaching out to close/distant friends	24	24.48
For academic information	14	14.28
For dating/relationships	9	9.18
Meeting new friends	8	8.16
News updates	7	7.14
Just to hang out	6	6.12
Total	98	100

Most students use social media to stay updated on general life matters (30.61%) and maintain social connections (24.48%). Only 14.28% utilize it for academic-related purposes.

Level of Academic Performance Relative to Social Media Use

Performance Level	Responses	Percentage (%)
High	15	15.30
Low	78	79.59
Undecided	5	5.10
Total	98	100

A striking 79.59% of respondents reported low academic

performance, which they attributed to time spent on social media. Only 15.30% claimed high academic performance, suggesting that excessive social media usage may be linked to academic underachievement.

Findings

This study investigated the impact of social media on the academic performance of university students in Nigeria. The key findings are as follows:

- Social media is recognized as one of the fastest and most accessible ways to send and receive information. However, excessive use—particularly by students addicted to social platforms—has led to noticeable negative impacts on academic performance.
- Data from the study revealed that 71.41% of students across the four selected universities do not use social media for academic purposes, while 30.61% do, and 5.10% remained undecided. This indicates that social media is predominantly used for non-academic activities.
- Facebook (40.81%), WhatsApp (20.40%), and 2go/Skype (14.28%) were found to be the most frequently used platforms among students. Other platforms such as MySpace, Twitter, Badoo, blogs, and Google+/Social bookmarking were rarely used for academic purposes.
- Another notable finding is that students primarily use social media to connect with close and distant friends and for general life information, rather than educational content. This aligns with previous research by Oghenetega, Oyenike, and Ugeh (2014)^[7], who found similar usage patterns among undergraduates.
- In terms of academic outcomes, a majority (79.59%) of the students surveyed admitted to poor academic performance due to overuse or addiction to social media. Only 15.30% of respondents reported high academic performance, suggesting a strong correlation between excessive social media use and academic decline.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Communication remains a fundamental human need, and throughout history, humans have continually developed new ways to fulfill this need. From speech and gestures to advanced digital tools, communication has evolved significantly. Social media has become a vital part of daily life and education, yet its influence on academic outcomes—particularly among Nigerian university students—warrants close attention.

This study explored the impact of social media on the academic performance of Nigerian undergraduates. The research aimed to determine both the extent of social media's contribution to students' education and how it affects their academic standards. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Students should prioritize academic use of social media. This includes following or subscribing to educational pages on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, and engaging with academic content regularly.
- Caution should be exercised when sharing or liking content. Students must ensure the information they engage with via social media is educational and beneficial to their academic growth.

- Time management is critical. Students are encouraged to spend more time studying and reading academic materials rather than spending hours browsing or chatting on social media, as prolonged usage has shown to negatively impact academic performance.

By adopting these practices, students can maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its distractions, ultimately improving their academic achievements and educational outcomes.

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